U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Alpena FRO Accomplishment Report

Partnerships and Accountability

Fisheries Program Vision for the Future Presented to Alpena Bass Club

Assistant Project Leader Tracy Hill presented the Fisheries Program's Vision for the Future to the Alpena Bass Club on March 3. This presentation is part of a strategic planning process to enhance partnership efforts for effective management of Great Lakes fisheries and aquatic resources. During the presentation, Hill provided the Bass Club with an overview of the Service's new Fisheries Vision for the Future and explained the activities of the Alpena FRO. Hill also requested feedback from the group on the Vision and sought input on how the Alpena FRO could better assist this group. Opportunities for collaborative projects with the group were discussed as well as strategies to enhance communication. Strategic planning for the future of the Service's Fisheries program requires enhanced efforts for partnering with state, tribal and local governments as well as NGOs to pursue collaboration and cooperation. Presentations such as this will improve partnerships and benefit the fisheries and aquatic resources of the Great Lakes.

Tracy D. Hill

Alpena League of Women Voters Seek ANS Information

On March 3, Alpena FRO Biologist Bowen met with June Tierney of the Alpena League of Women Voters to discuss aquatic nuisance invasives and other issues in Alpena County, Michigan. Bowen provided information and handouts on a variety of invasive species affecting our aquatic areas including: Eurasian watermilfoil, purple loosestrife, zebra mussels, Eurasian ruffe, round goby, rusty crayfish, and others. Special areas of interest were also highlighted including the unique features associated with Misery Bay and Squaw Bay and problems associated with Eurasian watermilfoil in Fletcher Pond. Public education and outreach are important parts of the Service's mission to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American public. Combating aquatic nuisance species is necessary to conserve and protect native species.

Anjanette K. Bowen

St. Marys River Fishery Task Group Meeting

Fishery Biologists Scott Koproski and Anjanette Bowen of the Alpena FRO and Terry Morse of the Marquette Biological Station participated in the March 9 meeting of the Lake Huron Technical Committee's St. Marys River Fishery Task Group held at the Bay Mills Resort and Casino in Brimley, MI. Discussion items at the meeting included the following issues in the St. Marys River: IJC proposal for peaking and ponding operations, sea lamprey control plans for 2004, updates to the Lake Huron Technical Committee, report on the 2002 St. Marys River survey, 2005 creel survey status for US and Canadian

portions of the river, walleye stocking and evaluation plan, and status report of river species. Partnerships are an important part of the Service's Fishery Strategic Vision and critical to the Service's mission to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American public.

Anjanette K. Bowen

Lake Huron U.S. Agency Coordination Meeting

Assistant Project Leader Tracy Hill and Fishery Biologist James Boase traveled to Bay City, Michigan on March 9 to attend the Lake Huron U.S. Agency Coordination Meeting. The purpose for the meeting was to assist federal, state, tribal and non governmental agencies to refine their management of the domestic Lake Huron watershed. The U.S. EPA and Environment Canada recently initiated an effort to develop a binational process to address basin-wide environmental issues in Lake Huron. To guide the development of the Lake Huron Binational Partnership, and to ensure that domestic responsibilities are met, agencies working in the Lake Huron watershed need to better understand each other's on-going activities, coordinate actions where possible, and set joint priorities for future action. Hill made a presentation during the meeting explaining the activities of the Alpena FRO relative to Lake Huron. The meeting was attended by 45 people representing the following organizations: USGS Great Lakes Science Center, NOAA Great Lakes Research Laboratory, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority, Michigan DNR, Huron Pines RC and D, Michigan Department of Agriculture, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, Northeast Michigan Counsel of Governments, and Ducks Unlimited. Partnerships are essential for effective fisheries conservation. Participation in this meeting was critically important to the Service and its Fisheries Vision for the Future, and to the collaborative management of fish and wildlife resources. Meetings such as this are extremely beneficial for maintaining effective partnership between the listed agencies.

Tracy D. Hill

Planning for Actions Toward a Sustainable Great Lakes Conference

Project Leader McClain participated in several conference calls in March as part of a planning team developing the program for the 2004 Actions Toward a Sustainable Great Lakes Conference to be held in Cleveland May 5-6. The conference, hosted by the Great Lakes Commission and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, has several sponsors including the Service. The Service is co-sponsoring the Habitat/Wetlands session with Ducks Unlimited on May 6. Field Supervisor Craig Czarnecki from the East Lansing Field Office is leading the planning effort for the Service with assistance from staff from other field stations in Regions 3 and 5. McClain is providing representation from the Region 3 Fisheries Program and is leading efforts to enhance participation by Great Lakes tribal representatives. The final draft agenda has been completed and efforts are being made by the planning team to publicize the event throughout the Great Lakes community in hopes of attracting an audience representing all facets of ecosystem interests. Partnerships and interagency collaboration are essential to meet the challenges facing the Great Lakes ecosystem. Participation in planning for ecosystem wide meetings such as this demonstrates the Service's commitment as an active partner in addressing the

common concerns of natural resource agencies and interest groups. Collaboration by the various Service program offices improves our efficiency and ensures a holistic approach to ecosystem management.

Jerry R. McClain

Fisheries Strategic Plan Presented to Michigan Association of RC&Ds

Alpena FRO Biologist Heather Enterline presented the Fisheries Vision for the Future at the annual meeting of the Michigan Association of Resource, Conservation and Development Offices (RC&Ds) on March 10 in South Haven, Michigan. The presentation was one in a series of presentations delivered to Service fishery partners that seek to familiarize these agencies with our strategic plan. RC&Ds are important partners to the Service in implementation of habitat restoration activities and/or watershed-scale plans. Questions were asked regarding funding opportunities through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Coastal Program, and the Fish Passage Program. Feedback and recommendations on the plan were requested; however no comments to the plan have been received to date. The Fisheries Vision for the Future is a roadmap for the Service Fishery Program. It describes priorities for the Fisheries Program for the next five years. Receiving input on this plan from our closest partners is critical to make this plan beneficial and meaningful to all stakeholders. Thirty people from RC&D Offices throughout Michigan were present for this talk.

Heather L. Enterline

Aquatic Species Conservation and Management

Experimental Assessment Gill Net Construction

Beginning in March, Fishery Biologists Scott Koproski and Adam Kowalski began building experimental assessment nets that will be used during the 2004 independent lake whitefish survey in 1836 Treaty waters. These nets are slightly different than standard assessment nets that have been used in past whitefish assessments. Both the standard and experimental nets will be fished during 2004 stock assessment activities for comparison. The standard assessment nets have lead weights secured directly to the frame of the nets. With leads attached to the frame, the standard assessment nets fish the bottom 6 feet of the water column. Most gill net surveys fish in this manner. Due to high abundances of lake trout in northern Lake Huron, significant numbers of lake trout are captured in standard bottom net sets. To reduce lake trout bycatch, the experimental nets do not have leads attached directly to the frame of the net. Instead, they have a three foot dropper line from the bottom of the frame that is tied to a continuous piece of lead core rope. This results in a “mesh free” area at the bottom 3 feet of the water column. The reason for having this “mesh free” area is that lake trout typically orient themselves directly on the bottom. By suspending the nets 3 feet from the bottom we hope to avoid unnecessary lake trout captures during whitefish assessments. Both lake trout and whitefish are native fish species of the Great Lakes. The Alpena FRO is responsible for fulfilling the Service's obligations as a signatory of the 2000 Consent Decree which requires the Service to obtain lake whitefish population data for stock assessment models. The experimental gill nets have been built in order to obtain whitefish data without adversely affecting efforts to rehabilitate lake trout in Lake Huron.

Scott R. Koproski

Public Use

One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish

Assistant Project Leader Tracy Hill participated in March Reading Awareness Activities at Ella White Elementary School on March 10th. Hill read the Dr. Seuss classic "One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish" to a second grade class. While visiting the class Hill had the opportunity to answer questions concerning the Service and the Fisheries Profession. This occasion provided an educational and outreach opportunity for the Alpena FRO to inform 25 children about fish and fishing opportunities.

Tracy D. Hill

Lake Sturgeon Habitat Project Presented to Grosse Point Sportsman's Club

Fishery Biologist James Boase traveled to Grosse Point Farms, Michigan on March 16, 2004 to attend the Grosse Point Sportsman's Club meeting. Boase gave a PowerPoint presentation titled "Lake Sturgeon in the Huron/Erie Corridor". Approximately 45 recreational anglers from the Grosse Point area attended the presentation. The informal presentation allowed the audience to participate throughout the talk by asking questions and sharing their encounters with lake sturgeon while fishing in Lake St. Clair and the Detroit and St. Clair rivers. Questions focused on how lake sturgeon habitat rehabilitation would enhance the abundance of other species, interaction with exotic species, potential for increased poaching as public awareness increases, and health risks associated with the consumption of lake sturgeon. The forum was an excellent opportunity for Boase to explain how the Alpena FRO is working with biologists, recreational anglers, and commercial fishers from both Canada and the US in efforts to better understand and enhance sturgeon populations throughout the Great lakes. Also, the meeting provided Boase an opportunity to interact with recreational anglers from Southeast Michigan and explain the vital role they play in the rehabilitation of lake sturgeon. This presentation provided an excellent opportunity to explain to the public the Service's mission and efforts to restore native fish and control exotic species. Specifically, the presentation focused on efforts to reconstruct lake sturgeon spawning habitat in the Detroit River and the benefits for other species of fish in that area of the Great Lakes. The benefits of native species restoration, and the detriments of exotic species were clearly defined and explained. The presentation was also an excellent outreach opportunity.

James C. Boase

Great Lakes Waterways Curriculum Underway with Local Educators

On March 24, Biologist Wells participated in a round table discussion with Alpena area educators and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) staff regarding the development of a Great Lakes waterways curriculum. The group was formed in January 2004 to formulate ideas on how to develop an educational tool that would encompass many facets of Great Lakes resources including fisheries. Many of the educators identified fisheries as a missing component in their teachings of Great Lakes issues and want to include the topic in the development of this curriculum. The group determined the focus age group to be grades four through seven. Many different ideas on a central theme for the curriculum where examined. One of these included imitating the route of a shipping vessel stopping at different ports in the Great Lakes where the resources at these locations can then be examined. The group will meet quarterly to

formulate more concise ideas and look for avenues of funding. This is an example of collaboration between federal agencies and local school districts to enhance education on Great Lakes natural resources and related issues. This group will provide avenues for the Service to enhance outreach efforts and will foster positive working relationships to benefit fish and wildlife resources.

Susan E. Wells

Cooperation with Native Americans

Service Biologist Chairs Modeling Subcommittee Meeting for 1836 Treaty Waters

Fishery Biologist Aaron Woldt of the Alpena FRO co-chaired the March 16-18 meeting of the Modeling Subcommittee (MSC) of the Technical Fisheries Committee (TFC). The primary focus of this meeting was to generate preliminary 2004 harvest limits for lake trout in 1836 Treaty waters of lakes Huron, Superior, and Michigan, although other technical matters were discussed. As stipulated in the 2000 Consent Decree, preliminary lake trout harvest numbers must be calculated by the MSC, reviewed by the TFC, and presented to the parties to the decree by March 31 each year. The 2000 Consent Decree is a 20 year fishery allocation agreement for 1836 Treaty waters signed by the State of Michigan, United States, Bay Mills Indian Community, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, and Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians. The MSC will complete final lake trout harvest numbers and present them to the parties by April 30th as stipulated in the Decree. Biologist Woldt and Ji He of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources presented an update of the status of northern Lake Huron (MH-1 and MH-2) lake trout stock assessment models, model diagnostic output, and preliminary 2004 lake trout harvest limits. 2004 Lake Huron preliminary lake trout harvest limits increased from 2003 levels due to lower than target total mortality rates and increases in stock biomass due to decreasing mortality. These preliminary limits were presented to the TFC for review on March 30. In addition to performing model analyses, biologist Woldt also ran the MSC meeting ensuring all agenda items were discussed and kept meeting minutes. A preliminary draft of the March 16-18 MSC meeting minutes was mailed to MSC members for review. Harvest limits produced at this meeting, when reviewed by the parties and finalized, will become binding 2004 lake trout harvest limits for 1836 Treaty waters. These harvest limits will allow lake trout fisheries to be executed while still protecting the biological integrity of the lake trout stocks. This outcome is consistent with the Service's goal of building and maintaining self-sustaining populations of native fish species while providing recreational fishing opportunities and meeting the needs of tribal communities.

Aaron P. Woldt

Leadership in Science and Technology

Aquatic Nuisance Species Net Repair

During the month of March, Fishery Biologists Adam Kowalski and Scott Koproski built and mended seven Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) gill nets. These nets are made of 1.5 inch stretch monofilament mesh and are 100 feet in length. They will be used in the Thunder Bay River to survey and control Eurasian Ruffe as part of the Alpena FRO's

annual sampling efforts. Building gill nets consists of stretching two lines, a float line with 12 floats sewn on it and a lead line with 12 lead weights sewn on it. Then the 1.5 inch monofilament mesh is sewn to each line by putting eight meshes per tie with a tie length of 7.5 inches repeatedly over the span of the net. Mending 1.5 inch mesh is not time effective due to the small size of the mesh. As a result, mending these ANS nets consisted of cutting out the entire stretch of mesh and sewing in new mesh. Net repair is very important for collecting accurate and consistent data during our annual fisheries assessments. Nets must be strung similarly and repaired to the same standard each year to assure consistent gear selectivity across sampling years. Net repair and construction will continue throughout the early spring until assessments start. ANS gill nets are used during the spring months to capture Eurasian Ruffe during their spawning period. This survey is done to understand the status of this invader and reduce their population numbers and economic and ecological impacts. Capturing ruffe during their spawning season also helps to reduce their range and population expansion. These outcomes are consistent with the Service's goal of reducing the establishment and spread of ANS species.

Adam T. Kowalski

Aquatic Habitat Conservation and Management

Fletcher Pond Improvement Association Work Group Meeting

Alpena FRO Biologist Bowen participated in the March 3 work group meeting of the Fletcher Pond Improvement Association held at the Jesse Besser Museum in Alpena, Michigan. The group discussed needs to evaluate the distribution and density of the Eurasian watermilfoil population in Fletcher Pond, possible courses of action to reduce the population, and potential grant sources to fund a vegetation evaluation and education resources. The meeting was progressive and served to move current issues along. The Service works to control aquatic nuisance species in the Great Lakes and partnerships are important part of the Service's mission to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American public.

Anjanette K. Bowen

Field Season Begins

A majority of the snow has melted in northern Michigan, and on March 31 Biologist Heather Enterline was able to get out into the field, take pictures, and observe post-construction response to fall 2003 wetland restoration projects. Most wetland restorations were filled to capacity, and the spillways were in use. Spring run-off was at its peak the last few days of March, and Enterline was able to evaluate and photograph a future road crossings project during the high water event. Sites were monitored in Alpena, Cheboygan, and Presque Isle Counties. Five wetland restoration sites were observed, totaling 18 acres of wetlands. All sites were functioning properly, and there were no erosion problems observed at the spillways. Mallard ducks and Canada Geese were observed utilizing several of the sites. Two of the sites will be buffered with cool-season

grasses and wildflowers that will be planted this spring. Post construction monitoring is essential for proper evaluation and fiscal accountability.

Heather L. Enterline

Workforce Management

Workforce Planning Team for Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance Meets

The Service's Workforce Planning Team for the Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance (FWMA) Program met in Phoenix, Arizona March 2-4 to begin a year long process to help identify skills and competency levels necessary for development of an effective workforce to better meet the challenges of an evolving program. Workforce planning has been identified by the Office of Management and Budget as an essential task for all federal agencies to improve efficiency and provide for improved fiscal accountability. The Workforce Planning Team is composed of representatives from each of the seven regions, the California/Nevada Operations Office and the Washington Office. Alpena FRO Project Leader McClain represents Region 3 on the team. A consulting firm, FMP Inc., has been hired to direct the effort with input from the Team. At the March meeting FMP provided the Team with an overview of the process to be used for this planning effort and the Team provided FMP with an overview, both national and regional, of the FWMA program, the skills and competencies of the current workforce and where we see the program moving in the future. A draft plan will be developed by FMP and provided to the Team for review in the next few weeks. This draft will be used as the starting point in a planning process that will lead to a series of recommendations to Fisheries Program managers to help guide the development of a workforce better able to meet the future challenges of the FWMA program. The Team is expected to reconvene through conference calls and one or two more meetings over the next several months. Development and retention of an effective and efficient workforce is critical to the current and future operations of the Service's Fish and Wildlife Management Assistance program. Planning efforts such as this are consistent with goals and objectives of the Service's Fisheries Vision for the Future and are critical for the agency to address the increasing concerns for the nation's aquatic resources.

Jerry R. McClain

Accomplishment Archive